

Report back to Committee required by:

Carry over bill LD 668

An Act to Market Maine's Hunting and Fishing Opportunities

Date: February 23, 2016

To: Senator Paul Davis, Chair
Representative Bob Duchesne, Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Presented By: Bonnie Holding, Information and Education Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

Subject: L.D. 668 - During the 127th Session of the Maine State Legislature, the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife considered L.D. 668, "An Act to Market Maine's Hunting and Fishing Opportunities." This bill directs the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to establish a comprehensive marketing program for the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife that is led and coordinated by a dedicated marketing specialist, whose position is required to be created within the department's Division of Public Information and Education.

Results and Discussion

Good afternoon Senator Davis, Representative Duchesne and honorable members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Bonnie Holding, Information and Education Director at Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

In 2015 the Department contracted with Responsive Management of Virginia to conduct an extensive survey of Maine citizens and create a marketing strategy. Responsive Management has 25 years of experience conducting market research regarding public opinions on and attitudes toward hunting, fishing and other natural resource-based outdoor recreation.

Responsive Management was contracted specifically to develop a plan that will raise overall awareness of Maine's residents of MDIFW's mission, programs and projects and measurably increase support of and participation in these programs. The overall plan will include marketing, communications, and public relations components. A preliminary plan summary has been provided to you supplementing our testimony. We are now comparing the marketing plan summary to partnerships and programs that we currently have going within the Department.

Partnerships: One of the Plan's recommendations is to maximize efforts and minimize costs by partnering with other agencies and industries. The Department currently partners with the Department of Economic and Community Development, Office of Tourism to attend a number of hunting, fishing and outdoor related trade shows throughout the Northeast. With their help we have expanded our effort by attending the North Carolina Fly Fishing Show in Winston-Salem, next week we will be in Philadelphia, and in April we will be at the Virginia Fly Fishing Festival.

The Office of Tourism also has worked with us on our Hunting and Fishing Maps as well as the completed Regional Analysis of Participation and Economic Contributions of Hunting and Fishing. We are currently working with them and the Maine Professional Guides Association on a marketing committee.

Social Media: The summary plan had multiple recommendations that had components of social media. We are currently reviewing these recommendations and comparing them with our on-going efforts. The Department regularly distributes information on a number of successful social media channels; GovDelivery email distribution, blogs and in press releases. Next, I will summarize some more specific information relevant to each of our social media channels.

Blogs:

The Department maintains a blog that is part of our existing maine.gov website, entitled “Inside Inland Fisheries & Wildlife”. This provides an online channel for the Department to share stories about our work, highlight projects, educate the public and share information about upcoming events through the voice of our talented and dedicated staff. This blog is directly linked to our very active Facebook page, Twitter account, and additionally distributed to thousands of email subscribers through the GovDelivery platform. IFW was the first state agency to develop this online tool.

After the launch of Inside Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, we were able to create additional blogs specific to some of our Citizen Science projects, providing a helpful and important communications tool for our staff who manage volumes of volunteers. Here are some examples:

Inside Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is: <http://www.maine.gov/wordpress/insideifw/>

Maine Heron Project: <http://www.maine.gov/wordpress/ifwheron/>

Maine Bumble Bee Atlas Project: <http://www.maine.gov/wordpress/bumblebeeatlas/>

Facebook , Twitter, Instagram:

The Department established a Facebook page in March of 2009 and was one of the first state agencies to utilize social media. It very quickly became an important tool for us to provide information to our public and we built an active following in a short time. We currently have over 89,000 followers and customers can contact us directly for assistance through our page, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The page is monitored regularly and provides the department with a critical venue to share information, and has also become an important customer service tool. The Department is also active on other social media such as Twitter and Instagram. Both allow our customers to interact with us, learn more about the work we do and ask for assistance.

Expanding our Message

The summary plan recognized other areas where we can expand our message. Creating a healthy lifestyle was focused on multiple times. In addition to our other education programs we are now exploring the “locavore” movement. For those of you who aren’t familiar with this term it is a word that describes the current trend toward utilizing locally sourced foods, both produce and meats that are free-range and organic. We have had four very successful workshops so far, partnering with the local Community Colleges that offer culinary programs. Introducing participants to properly care for and prepare game has become a great avenue for discussing the benefits of hunting and angling.

I have provided just a quick summary of our communication and outreach programs and in closing, we would offer that we have made strides since Responsive Management began their study to work on our messaging and marketing. With the feedback from Responsive Management's study we plan to examine all of their recommendations. I would like to offer that Mark Duda, Executive Director of Responsive Management has joined us today and is available to provide additional details to the committee related to the study.